

The Development of the Canned Asparagus Production and Marketing System in Postwar Taiwan (1950s-1960s)

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ABSTRACT

This study traces the development of canned asparagus production and marketing in postwar Taiwan. Moreover, it examines the impact of the newly introduced crop of asparagus on the agricultural history of Taiwan and the diversity of canned agricultural exports from Taiwan. The introduction and cultivation of asparagus enhanced Taiwan's adoption of international agricultural science and technology. However, the critical breakthrough in farming methods, the "mother stalk" cultivation method widely practiced in Taiwan, was seen as a locally developed agricultural skill. This method was derived from the farming approach applied to the cultivation of bamboo shoots in Taiwan. In other words, the key technology for the cultivation and harvesting of asparagus in Taiwan was actually developed from local agricultural knowledge.

In the mid-to-late 1960s, canned asparagus produced in Taiwan surpassed that in the US, most of which was exported to West Germany, the most internationally important canned asparagus market at the time. Taiwan's export sales of canned asparagus soon ranked top in the world. In order to optimize the stability of production and to stay competitive in the global market, the government intervened in the production and marketing of canned asparagus. Specifications for the production of canned asparagus and inspection of ingredients were formulated with reference to those of Taiwan's main competitors, including the US and Japan. Implementation of international market standards had a significant impact on local farming communities and farmers.

Moreover, the production and marketing system developed by the government strengthened the connection between the asparagus farmers and the farmers' associations, creating a production and marketing chain that linked farmers, farmers' associations, food canneries, canned asparagus exporters, and West German importers. In sum, active interaction between the people and the government, as well as local farming communities and international trade markets, promoted the rise of Taiwan as the key canned asparagus exporter in the mid-to-late 1960s.

Keywords: Asparagus, Canned Food, West Germany, Food Export